Radcliffe, Mary Ann (C. 1746–After 1810)

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Radcliffe, Mary Ann (c. 1746–after 1810)

Scottish-born writer. *Name variations: Mrs. Radcliffe; Mary Anne Radcliffe. Born around 1746 in Scotland; died after 1810; married Joseph Radcliffe, around 1760; children: eight.*

Selected writings:

The Fate of Velina de Guidova *(1790);* Radzivil *(1790);* The Female Advocate; or An Attempt to Recover the Rights of Women from Male Usurpation *(1799);* Manfrone; or The One-Handed Monk *(1809);* The Memoirs of Mrs. Mary Ann Radcliffe in Familiar Letters to her Female Friend *(1810).*

Born in Scotland around 1746, Mary Ann Radcliffe was two years old when the death of her father made her heir to a sizeable fortune. She was raised in her father's Protestant faith, although her mother was Catholic, and at some point moved to England. When she was only 14 she fell in love with and secretly married Joseph Radcliffe, a Catholic in his 30s. Her husband showed a fondness for liquor and bad luck in business, which whittled away her inheritance while she gave birth to eight children over the years. When their marriage finally collapsed, Radcliffe was left to fend for herself and her children. She found such "genteel" (and low paying) work as acting as a governess and as a lady's companion and housekeeper, and later operated a retail shoe store and then a school. By the time she was in her 40s, she had turned to writing and, as "Mrs. Radcliffe," published both *Radzivil* and *The Fate of Velina de Guidova* in 1790.

In the 18th and 19th centuries many women writers published their work using "Mrs." and their married names, and Radcliffe's use of "Mrs. Radcliffe," as well as the Gothic-tinged flavor of her fiction, led to some contemporary confusion between her works and those of **Ann Radcliffe** , the enormously popular author of such Gothic extravaganzas as *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Also in this vein was her brief literary magazine *Radcliffe's New Novelist's Pocket Magazine*, which started and stopped publishing in 1802, and her 1809 novel *Manfrone; or The One-Handed Monk* (published under her full name), which was at first refused by her publisher because of its frank depiction of violence and neurotic sexuality. Its success nonetheless led to a second edition, published in 1819.

Altogether different from her novels, and perhaps of more interest to the modern-day reader, was Radcliffe's *The Female Advocate; or An Attempt to Recover the Rights of Women from Male Usurpation* (1799). With her painful, firsthand knowledge of the precarious existence that women who had only been educated to be wives faced when suddenly forced to earn their own living, she pressed the case for wider employment opportunities for women, and cited the arguments of both **Mary Wollstonecraft** and **Hester Chapone** . This book later formed part of *The Memoirs of Mrs. Mary Ann Radcliffe in Familiar Letters to her Female Friend* (1810), in which, no doubt drawing on her own experience, she also wrote about the dangers of hasty marriages. There is scant information about Radcliffe's life after the publication of her memoirs, although it is known that she lived in Edinburgh, unwell and supported financially by friends, before her death some time in the early 19th century.

sources:

Shattock, Joanne. *The Oxford Guide to British Women Writers.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

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